

THE MULHERN STORY LIBRARY — SALON READING GUIDE

The Ransom of Red Chief

O. Henry · American Realism / Humor · first published 1907

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| AUTHOR | O. Henry |
| PUBLISHED | 1907 |
| ERA | American Realism / Humor |
| THEMES | Comeuppance, Greed, Childhood |
| READER PATHWAY | Accessible adult / college entry |

INTRODUCTION FOR THOUGHTFUL READERS

Two small-time crooks kidnap a wealthy man's son for ransom, but the boy proves so wild and exhausting that the kidnapers end up paying the father to take him back.

HISTORICAL & LITERARY CONTEXT

Published in 1907 and collected in *Whirligigs* (1910), this farce showcases O. Henry's comic timing and reversal of expectations. For mature readers, it opens questions about comic violence, regional caricature, and the ethics of laughter.

DISCUSSION FOCUS

Situational irony, comic characterization, hyperbole, reversal, and narrative pacing. A light but revealing entry point for discussing how farce disciplines greed and foolish confidence.

SALON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What assumptions about class, region, masculinity, and childhood does the comedy depend on?
- How does O. Henry make humiliation feel like moral correction?

READ & RESEARCH

1. Full text at Wikisource — https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Ransom_of_Red_Chief
2. *Whirligigs* at Project Gutenberg — <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/1595>